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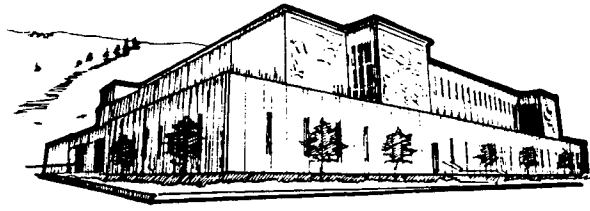
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University of
Montana

Old Lady Hawk Spirit

By

Virginia Costello

B.A., Ripon College, 1986

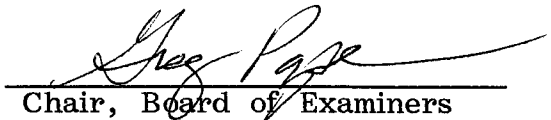
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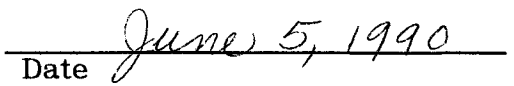
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

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29-90

To my mother,
and in memory of
Gary Olivero
and Ray Matthews

Acknowledgements:

"Listen" in "Words on Wilderness,"
"Taking Ray and Charlie to Church"
in the St. Elizabeth Catholic Worker Newspaper
"After Date Rape"
in Women's Place News Letter

"We have all known the long loneliness
and we have learned that the only solution is love
and that love comes with community."

- Dorothy Day -

Contents

I. Crossing the Line

Imagining Your Death	8
After Your Death	10
Yet Another Dream of You	12
Taking Ray and Charlie to Church	14
For Charlie	16
Holding Ray, Holding Me at 3:00 a.m.	17
One Day You and I Got Tired of Being Ourselves	19
Another Night	21
Peeling Potatoes	23
Mary Elizabeth Wears Strange Underwear	25
Mary Elizabeth is so Funny	26
Aunt Rosemary	28
Crossing the Line	29
Caroline and Me	32
The Hitchhiker	34
Cold Wet Rocks	36
Claiming Her Grandfather	38
Pieces	40
In Our Sleep	41

II. R & H Auto Parts

Things are Looking up in the Chicken Factory	44
Tin Thud	46
Soccer Shoes	48
Sundays	49
After Date Rape	51
Beyond Locked Doors	53
Words Pull	54
Old Rug	55
That Four Letter Word Starting with "L"	57
Suicide	59
Listen	60
Old Lady Hawk Spirit	62
R & H Auto Parts	64

I.

"Crossing the line? I've lived on it
one way or another all my life...

I sometimes feel I'm nothing but lines--
a crux of bloodlines there's no way not to cross."

- Louise Erdrich -

Imagining Your Death

(March 24, 1988, St. Elizabeth Catholic Worker, Chicago)

The food bank closes at three
and you're running late again, we were always late.
People with folded brown bags
come to our door on Tuesdays and Fridays
for cereal, potatoes, cans of meat, soup
or instant milk on Tuesdays and Fridays.
You shuffle to the car, through broken
beer bottles, bits of paper, oil cans
as if you hear Willie Nelson singing "Blue Eyes."
From the room she never leaves,
Mary Elizabeth waves. Charlie is high,
needs a ride to the El, wants you
to drive with the doors open.

You speed through yellow lights,
drop off Charlie, but a truck
whips into your lane.
Jerking the steering wheel,
you bounce over the median.

You wear the same red t-shirt

I wore in our bed,
your train engineer's hat slants slightly,
brown eyes squint behind dusty
black rimmed glasses.

The man in the other car
sings in Spanish with the radio.
Cigarette ashes spill
as he taps his fingers on the steering wheel.
You didn't see him.

You and I can't see anything any more,
but we feel the pain in your body
curled around the steering wheel,
head lumped below the cracked windshield,
jeans soaked with warm blood.
The caller says circle 'round,
swing your partner, dosy-doe.
We dance together for a moment,
then I am alone.

After Your Death, You Still Hug and Haunt Me

Some days I think I hear
your soft words in the voices
of our homeless: Harold mumbles
at the TV; Mary Pat whispers
to her invisible nuns. Ray cries out
for you in the middle of the night
and when I go to him, he thinks I am you.

On these days you haunt
the soup line like the smell
of old moist vegetables,
sticking in beards of ragged men,
in sweaters of torn women.

Yesterday I saw a photograph:
open mouthed students
wave peace banners; police
with nightsticks drag away
someone who thought like you.

I feel you in warm rushes
of wind that roll down
this mountain, across
my face, through my hair
like fingers gently pulling.

You surround me
with the smell of lilacs,
of thick purple bushes blooming outside
our basement apartment in Chicago.

I want you to tell me again
to wet my lips, close my eyes,
as you touch the metal
of my spoon to my tongue;
I taste a small bite of turtle cheese cake,
taste your silky tingling kiss.

Yet Another Dream of You

I know it is you,
that gray figure dancing
at the high end of the smooth ash drawbridge.
Its low end touches Oak Street beach,
leans out over the lake
where dull silver chains vanish in clouds.

I remember you are dead,
but yell, "Gary!" and run.
Lake Shore Drive appears
between me and your bridge.
It's the same four lane highway
you and I crossed last summer
for our fried tofu picnic.
We crossed again and wandered
through waves of school children
who packed the museum of Natural History.

I slow before crossing, look for cars,
let a shiny black pick-up, with a new silver grate,

and a rusty blue Chevy Capri pass, but
you and the bridge disappear.
I take off my shoes and walk away.

Taking Charlie and Ray to Church

I dress you in your long underwear,
tan hat, thick wool sweater even though
it's seventy-eight degrees outside.
I comb your white silk hair
shave you, pat on aftershave,
let Charlie have some too,
but he wants to keep the bottle.
"What're you afraid I'll drink it?
I'm not three, I'm sixty three!"
I touch his shoulder
then return the green bottle to its hiding place
next to his cigarettes, aspirin,
Maalox, Geritol, and decaffeinated coffee
in the broken basement refrigerator.

We go to church
because you enjoy shaking hands.
Charlie likes people to notice him
in his gray bow tie, and shiny shoes.
I love to tell people that at ninety-nine
you still play the piano,
and kiss everyone on the lips.

Charlie still plays the harmonica,
and washes the dishes.
We all enjoy the twenty mile drive
through lime-green Wisconsin hills
even though Ray announces every
Red Barn! White House! Cow! he sees,
and Charlie repeats, "We're off,
said the psychiatrist" every time
I pass a car, truck, or tractor.

We sit in the first pew so you can see
and Charlie and I can be seen.
Halfway through the service,
hands folded on your lap, head bent,
you softly snore. Charlie pages
through the missalette
looks for familiar songs,
and I watch the minister's hair sway
across her dark robe as she speaks.
She asks for a moment of silence
but the silence wakes you.
You turn, grin at Charlie, and roar.
"WELL, HALLO CHARLIE!!"

For Charlie

For Charlie who always wants more
cigarettes, Maalox, Geritol,
coffee, sugar, Tylenol 3,
I've got to tell you,
you'll be one hundred
before you save up enough Pall Mall coupons
to get that color T.V.;
I've watered down your Maalox;
I only give you half the normal dose of Geritol,
(which by the way is only 13% alcohol);
The coffee is decaf, the sugar, saccharin
and the Tylenol #3 has no codeine;
it's generic aspirin.
But you already know.

Holding Ray, Holding Me at Three a.m.

The pieces of your sentences
and desperate demands for Mommy
wake me for the fourth time
this morning. Struggling
with the heaviness of my body
I rise, stumble into your room.
A sliver of light from the hall
falls on your wrinkled face.
You open your arms, call me Mommy,
despite the seventy-five years
that separate us. Other volunteers
of this shelterhome tell how
when you first came here,
at eighty-six, the children
followed you, listened to your stories,
fought for your lap.

Fourteen years later, I kneel,
lean over the cold metal frame of your bed.
It digs into my ribs
as your long bony arms wrap me close

to your warm wet breath that smells like soft moldy carrots,
to your body and the thick scent of urine.
My arm draped over your shoulder,
I kiss your cheek, lay my head on your pillow.
We drift into fragments of sleep.

One Day You and I Got Tired of Being Ourselves

1

You didn't want to be ninety-eight
any more; you wanted to climb
the hills, swim in the creek, walk
barefoot through warm mud banks,
drink spring water from your own hands,
hear the owls, weed and water
the vegetable garden, make love with someone.
I didn't want to be twenty-four
and female. I wanted to be you: to sit
and stare at luscious hills, watch cows graze,
eat fresh vegetable soup,
listen to you read my old letters
or an article on Blavatsky,
demand kisses by kissing the air
raising my eyebrows and looking at you.

2

I am your crutch as we struggle
to get you to your feet.
Once standing we swiftly pivot

your hips, strain to slowly sink
you onto the feather pillow
in my wooden rocker. I try
to braid your short silky hair
then tie a scarf around your head.
I wear your tan glasses,
tuck my braid under your gray hat
sit in your wheel chair,
blanket pulled to my chin.
I pretend to snore softly.
You kiss my hand, hold it and rock.

Another Night

I kneel by the foot pedal of your wheel chair,
shave your wrinkled face,
hope you were asleep and did not hear
or perhaps do not remember
the screams last night.

Charlie had just found the aftershave,
gulped it down, and started on
the Geritol before I ripped
it from his lips and forced
my finger down his throat.
After he vomited blood and aftershave
I helped him to his bed.
Henry stood outside yelling,
finally stumbled in
and I tried to quiet him,
but told him I would never sleep with him.
Even though he threatened
suicide, I made him leave.

2

This morning your pale blue eyes

look tenderly through me.
I smile as if it could protect you
as if you didn't know.
As I finish shaving you,
you cross your eyes, whisper
"Thank you Mommy,"
pucker your lips, kiss the air,
kiss my cheek, my lips.
"Wow!" I yell, laughing
hands over heart.

Peeling Potatoes

Her dark brown eyes watched me cut
the rotten parts out of green peppers,
teach her older sister to peel potatoes.
Then she walked up to my knees,
tilted her head back and opened her arms.
When I picked her up, she kept hugging me.
"Girl, you gonna choke her!" her sister laughed.

More kids walked into the kitchen,
looking for the reason someone laughed.
They fought over who got to peel the potatoes,
who got to sit on my lap. The younger ones
bopped each other, claimed
they could peel potatoes too,
begged me to let them try.
The older ones tried to peel potatoes with knives.
They said, "I know how to peel potatoes."
But with the peels they cut off chunks of potato
and I let them. One of their mamas came in,
looked at her daughter and said, "Girl,
what you doin'? You don't know how to do nothin'."

When the mama left, a boy held up a potato
that looked like a skinny rat with its eyes gouged out.
He was sô proud, but the little girl told him
that it didn't look like a potato anymore. He smiled.
"Course not," he said, "It's naked."
Then we were all laughing, hiding our naked potatoes.

Mary Elizabeth Wears Strange Underwear

She doesn't like clothes
bought in a store. She rips
her sheets and ties them
around her body. Green and yellow
flowered sheet fastened to her wrists
like cotton wings. "Seams hurt my skin,"
she told me and pulled a wrinkle
from her hand. One day I brought her
a soft purple turtle-neck
with brown duck prints. She laughed,
cut the neck and cuffs off,
wore her ducks inside-out.
When I brought her lunch
she lifted her sheet, showed me
with a laugh, how her thin legs
had slipped past ducks, through sleeves,
how peeing was easy.

Mary Elizabeth is so Funny

1

Mary Elizabeth lives in her yellow room,
covers her floor with newspaper,
asks why the air sticks to her skin,
rubs and pulls her wrinkled face
when she talks, tells you
about the day she bought pants,
the history of any archdiocese in Chicago,
explains that Sister Christine,
dead since '69, still tells
the priests at St. Edward's
how to write their sermons,
tells you that the late Mayor Daly,
managed to buy six apartment buildings
and win four elections,
by investing in pink grapefruit.

2

I brought her fried potatoes
toast, coffee and scrambled eggs,

but she poured coffee
over everything and said, "Ah,
much better." And ate it all.
Mary Elizabeth is so funny.
She climbs on the window sill
and opens the window in winter,
telling me, it's warm air
because the window faces south.
She doesn't like any kind of toilet,
uses a coffee can instead,
but sometimes misses and hides it
under the newspaper. She tells me
I work too hard, says
people should protect their heads
from the salty air.

Aunt Rosemary

Aunt Rosemary believes Jesus is trying to hurt her.

She believes He picks the scabs

from the ulcer on her calf.

She believes saints pull her hair,

pinch her eyelids.

She believes the Virgin Mary will protect her

if she prays all night.

She doesn't remember that in the Catholic orphanage

where she was raised, they hated the Irish.

She doesn't remember the nun who beat her with a ruler,

or the Polish children who teased her.

She doesn't remember that she never had a toothbrush,

or the prayers she was forced to memorize

before she ate.

She remembers the copper crucifix above her bed

and a blue and white Mary

on the bedstand, arms upraised.

Crossing the Line

1

I ask Annie
if the smug white faces
we saw last spring
on our seven mile march
through Hayden Lake haunt her,
if the shadows behind
the mirrored windows
in those cars,
behind barbed wire fences,
in those fields
follow her home at night
and crawl under the door.
I ask her even though
I know they do.

At night, I hear them whisper
when I read. Their steady eyes
watch me undress,
pale pink faces
appear in my shower,
lie under my blankets.

Their straight lined lips open
into square mouths that laugh
like the man who called us bitches
the night we walked
down Broadway with a hundred women
carrying candles and chanting.

2

On Easter Sunday Annie and I drive
to Malmstrom Air Force Base.
Fifty-three people hold hands,
stand in a circle singing.
In front of the wide white line
children draw chalk peace signs, curls of faces
and young uniformed women
on the other side
hand out written warnings.
One reads aloud, "...may cost you
up to five hundred dollars,
and six months in jail..."
Singing louder, I squeeze
Annie's hand, stare
at the woman and man
in the circle's center,

want to cross the line with them,
know I already have.

Caroline and Me

I call the young white woman
Caroline. She straightens her tie,
smoothes her slacks, picks a piece of lint
from her thigh. She clears
her throat and begins to climb
the steps. The old black woman
sits on the third stair. She hides
her thin body in baggy jeans
and an extra large sweat shirt.
I call her Shaoolee. The children
to whom she gives brown bread
and powdered milk are not her own:
Sarah has freckles and light brown hair,
Miranda's small eyes slant slightly,
Leo, the brown one, wears braces on his legs.
Shaoolee hugs each one and kisses their dirty faces.
Caroline pauses, wonders how
she will climb over them.
"Caroline sit and visit with me,"
Shaoolee coaxes. The young woman
looks at her watch then sits down.
Shaoolee talks in soft soothing voice.

"I am you," she says, "You are me."

"I must go on," Caroline answers, "It's been lovely."

"Yes," the old woman replies.

The young woman stands but the air

is too thick and the children cry

and cling to her legs. She cannot

look at them. Shaoolee gently

plucks the children from her legs, carries

her up a few stairs, helps her sit down.

Caroline tries to stand up

brush herself off and look at the children,

but falls into Shaoolee's arms.

The Hitchhiker

I pick up a man who hobbles
down the roadside. His light green eyes
ask if I am stopping for him.
His hoarse voice stutters.
Straining to listen, I apologize,
explain I am hard of hearing,
"Say it one more time."
"I'm M-M-Mike Mike N-N-Nelson."
The rest of the trip I repeat
fragments of his sentences
like "looking for work," "35 years old"
"lived in Missoula," "Not married?" aloud.
He thinks he knows me, shows me a scar
that starts in his inner wrist,
curves up his forearm in fat half circles
facing one way then the other,
bouncing from one side to the other.
Mumbling, he traces the scar with his finger
stops when it disappears under
his folded flannel sleeve.

The air is warm and he asks

if he may open the window.
I like his light green eyes,
the inward turn of his left leg,
the way he sits close to the door,
looks at me then the window,
rolling it down an inch,
looks at his lap and smiles,
like the old man next door who often
came to our house for dinner when I was young.

Disappointment swells in his voice
and eyes after I tell him I have to go to work,
offer him a dollar and let him out on Orange Street.
Later I worry that his grandparents will worry,
that I drove him too far away and his beautiful eyes
will not remember the way, or perhaps
he will not find a ride home.
I want to find him,
take him to lunch,
follow his scar with my finger.

Cold Wet Rocks

When darkness seeps through
the frosted window, strangles
the last bit of light in my room,
and shadows blend into nothing,
I slip under.

I dream our hands glide over graffiti
on the bar bathroom wall, searching
for the light switch. We watch
a woman and man dressed in yellow
step through the wall's jagged hole
of plaster and brick. We watch them
fall, pierce their bodies on cold wet rocks.
Her body lies five feet from his;
You say, "They were not in love."

We fumble in gray darkness.
You know the hole is there,
yet you walk near it.
Still groping for the switch,
you lean in then fall.
Screaming I run, look down.

Your body's illuminated, crushed
on those rocks.

I wake my housemates with my screams,
but cannot wake myself. It takes
all day to pull you from those rocks.

Claiming Her Grandfather

1

After her grandfather died
she gently bit the inside of her cheeks for weeks
realizing it only when she tasted the iron of open sores
or when her tongue glided over welts.

2

Those summers in Chicago she fed him vegetarian meals,
changed his diapers, shaved his face by gently pulling
and smoothing the wrinkled skin
that hung on his cheek bones, sunk into his mouth
like long lace curtains.

One summer they lived on a farm
in the warm wet hills of Wisconsin
where he wanted to die but could not.

3

Legally not his relative,
she tells the airlines her grandfather died,
pays the bereavement fare, flies home,
feels like she's not lying, like she's
part of him and she has to say goodbye

to that old body he lived in so long.

4

She calls him grandfather now, wears his shirts
and his old gray hat but the insides
of her cheeks are still raw,
and she doesn't notice how before she talks or eats,
she blows air in her cheeks
to push them away from her teeth.

Pieces

When the old man died,
I took his gray hat
wore the brim low
and mean.

I took his magenta t-shirt
which proclaims love
as the only solution.

I took the Mexican bracelet,
I bought for him, the one
made of thin bright yarn
woven into triangles and diamonds.

I took his afghan,
his yellow rugby shirt,
turquoise long underwear,
gold cardigan, a picture of his niece,
dusty theosophical books.

I took these pieces
without asking; I took these pieces
and spread them around my room.

In Our Sleep

for Frank

I never slept with anyone like you
who held me through the night,
tried to mesh our rib cages together
carefully as folded hands, as fingers caress backs.
In sleep I push you,
whisper, "We gotta get out of here,"
crawl to the end of the bed.
You ask me where I'm going
and I wake, remember that in my dream
you were an African,
and I, an Indian woman.
Surrounded by pink walls,
we stand in front of a desk
and watch, through a cracked door,
a white general in the next room
lean over a table of clothes,
search through skirt pockets and purses.

When you're not in my bed,
I don't remember where I went
or what I said in my dreams.

I look for the gray feather
in my robe pocket,
the one you gave me last spring,
smooth the web-like vanes.
I stretch across the bed in search of you.

II.

"'Here,' she said, 'in this place, we flesh;
flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet
in the grass. Love it. Love it hard.
Yonder they do not love it.'"

- Toni Morrison -

Things are looking up at the Chicken Factory

Finally the Severing machine's
loud sawing and grinding,
like the unzipping
of drumsticks from thighs,
then thighs from headless torsos,
ceased grating my eardrums.
(I can actually hear the radio!)

I can't taste the cold mucilage air
saturating my mouth or feel
its thickness clogging my lungs.
I don't slip on the bloody mucus floor
or care if the thick reddish-yellow liquid
splatters and sticks to my Wellies.
I've forgotten the clear odorless fluid dripping
from the pimply grey chickens
which hang on silver hooks above the door
between the gutting room
and our cutting room.

As usual, at 10:00 a.m. the supervisor switched
our machine to "breast and bone,"
but when meaty rib cages tumbled out

the metal shoot toward me,
I didn't flinch. I meticulously snipped
the thin membrane on either side of the sternum,
dug my fingers in and ripped out the bone
without feeling that horrifying necromantic power.
It didn't even hurt to wrap my hands
around each breast, crush
the thin ends of the ribs
and tuck them under to make the cleavage
look deep and lascivious
in soft blue styrofoam trays.

Tin Thud

We couldn't agree on what to do
so four of us sat on the small ledge
of the large picket fence,
gently kicking garbage cans.
I liked to hear the tin thud,
feel the swing and looseness in my calves
and thighs. Bobby raised an eyebrow,
and announced that Tommy should strip.
Chuckling Mark elbowed Tommy. I laughed.
"I don't think so," Tommy sucked his teeth,
hands between his legs. "Let's--" Bobby shouted again.
"No, no, no!" Tommy jumped in.
"Yes! Wait! Let's make Tommy AND Ginger
take off all their clothes."
"Wrong." Tommy squeezed his bare knees.
"Nope," I added, kicking the can harder.
"Wait, let's just make GINGER
take off all her clothes."
"Yeah," Mark smirked, looking at my small breasts.
"Ha. Ha. 'Fraid not." As eyebrows raised,
and eyes widened, I crossed my arms.
"Let's get Stevie. He can help us hold her down."

"Yeah. We'll get Big Mike too."

"Get lost."

The boys jumped off the fence
banged the garbage cans
with their hands as they landed,
then ran. I wiped my hands on my shorts,
sucked on my bottom lip,
heard them yell, "Hey Stevie!
Stevie we got a great game!"
I kicked a garbage can over
then ran, crying, found Chrissy, Anne
and Liz on Seifert's basement stairs,
putting their dolls to bed.
"Can I play with you guys?"

Soccer Shoes

We wrestled, my brothers

Joe, John and I, and once,

Dad, who was always too thin,

and smelled of Christian

Brother's Brandy and cigars.

His arm reached from behind

my back, fingers fondling

my newly formed breasts.

No one saw and I pretended

not to notice either.

I buried it years deep

inside my soccer shoes,

but my big toenail is wrinkled,

festering, ready to fall off.

The raw toe will be left to stop

the ball and to kick it back.

Sundays

On Sundays I'm nervous;
not because you've gone home for a few days,
and I sleep with the cat, or that you're not here
to smoke Drum Light tobacco,
laugh at my flimsy roll-your-own,
tease me about old boyfriends,
or how I "trap" you in my room,
seduce you while you pretend
to call 911 and my mother.

On Sundays I call my parents in Chicago,
sit curled with the cats on the couch,
bite the inside of my bottom lip
and ask my father how much he weighs.
"Ninety-five pounds," he laughs, "even though
I eat ice cream with chocolate syrup every day."
I imagine he sits on the rusty kitchen stool,
sipping strong black coffee.
He tells me he likes the Montana anthology
I bought, but it's too heavy for his lap;
he's afraid one day it will crush him.
He chuckles and I promise

to read to him this summer.
We talk about his CAT scan;
my clothes grow heavy
as if a muggy Chicago August afternoon
engulfed my cabin, and I remember his deep cough,
the bulging blue veins on back of his hands.
Deciding to bring him mountain pictures,
I think about this summer, without you.

After Date Rape

She holds her breath,
covers her eyes, plays deaf,

tightens her jaw muscles, as teeth
push against teeth. Intestines writhe.

Shivers ripple down her back. She decides,
"I cannot live this way." She's been lying

to her body, saying it's alright,
nothing really happened that night.

The wise part of her body says,
You're wrong. She burns sage

and listens to it: No. No. No. Let go
letgo. Again it yells, No. She throws

herself into the closet, scratches
her breasts with broken glass.

But the wise part keeps yelling until someone

who knows opens the door, pulls her from

the dirty socks, panties and shoes,

holds her hard, tells her what her body knows,

"It is not your fault.

It is not your fault."

Beyond Locked Doors

That first day I saw the light blue room
you sat rocking on your hospital bed.
I brought you geraniums and watched
you pick every ball of lint from your wool socks.
"I cannot live like this," you told me.
"If I don't get out tonight,
I'll have to kill myself." I argued
but you still wanted to walk barefoot
across Orange Street Bridge in February.
Your glossy eyes wander over my face.
Driving home I chew my knuckles.

When I was alone, I thought about how
your madness unwraps my madness
like old newspaper layers,
slowly unties each yellowing string,
reveals my blue windowless room.

Words Pull

I stay in my room afraid
of his words that crawl under the door,
announce, "You were never a child."
They pull at my folds,
the sagging skin, push me in front
of this mirror where I am old
but have no laugh lines yet.
My eyebrows push against each other
forming wavy lines across my forehead.
Under my serious eyes purple rings hang.
Even my smooth skin feels like old woman skin,
thin hairless wrist skin. Rolls
of wrinkles, like elastic bands
stretched too far, too long,
circle my raw throat. Horrified I stare
a second longer, then fall
away. I finally face my friend
apologize for his having to see
her/me but cannot yet bring
myself to thank him
for showing her to me.

Old Rug

Words flutter like dust
from the beating of our old rug.
I turn from the pain in your eyes
not caring. Obsessed, I long to escape.

From the beating of our old rug,
comes the hatred of you,
not caring. Obsessed, I long to escape.
Sick with hope

comes the hatred of you
wanting a life I can't commit to.
Sick with hope
I still hang on to you,

wanting a life I can't commit to.
Bitter words haunting the air,
I still hang on to you
thinking I must.

Bitter words haunting the air,
I cringe, but still love past hiking trips,

thinking I must.

Pretending to let go of "us,"

I cringe, but still love past hiking trips,
parachuting and lying on the green couch.

Pretending to let go of "us,"

you and I still plan rock climbing trips

parachuting and lying on the green couch.

Words flutter like dust,

you and I still plan rock climbing trips.

I turn from the pain in your eyes.

That Four Letter Word, Starting with "L"

I finally feel it!

It reddens the rims of my eyelids,
blackens the rings under my eyes,
makes me curl under wool blankets
behind boxes of books
in the dirty peach basement,
where once, I read Keats'
last letters aloud, but you sang
"Whistlin' an' a Fishin',"
aimed Paradise Lost at me,
and I stopped.

Last week, in sleep, I punched the wall
above your head, woke whimpering,
held my throbbing knuckles. Last night
I woke to your scream and my teeth
in your back, clamped on a roll
of soft rubbery skin that tasted
like raw rotting chicken.
"What the fuck?!" you yelled
and I shrunk back to the wall,

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry," I whispered,
and yearned to laugh.

Suicide

The hot hurt questions burn
through layers of skin, muscle tissue,
blood vessels, down deep to the bone,
through the bone to the marrow,
within every white blood cell
of the marrow, in every bone
in every part of my body;
I hurt for reasons.

Listen

We suck the foamy water
that streams from the mountains,
damn her milky flow.

We poke geophones into her skin,
blast holes in her stomach,
cause our bear and goat sisters
to miscarry.

We yank out her grassy hair,
chop off her fingers and arms
break them into logs and two by fours,
leave her roots overflowing with water.

We strip away her sage dress,
grab the soft clay of her thighs,
discover the moss between her legs,
drill deep into her,
find warm oil, sacred ovals of coal.

We plow through her flesh,
dig so deep we rip

the muscles of her heart
and now she is taking us.

She raised us and still we ignore
her voice screaming from inside ourselves.

Old Lady Hawk Spirit

Searching for the Osprey nest,
I paddle my canoe down the river.
But she sees me first, circles, swoops
down, skims the river's surface screaming--
follows until I've long passed her nest.

When I land several people
are gathered around the fire.
I smudge myself with sage smoke
and wait. Black Bear Charging
leads us around the sweat,
asking the four directions
to bless our gifts of tobacco
and oranges. He leads us
into the steamy darkness
where willow branches bend
into a nest over us.
Water sizzles, rises
from hot rocks as feathers
fan wet heat waves
over us. Hot mist

singes our tongues
when we open our mouths and sing.

It is here, in this black heat,
that the Old Lady Hawk Spirit
teaches me to glide.

R & H Auto Parts

The poster of a woman holding a Stanley wrench
against her bare stomach
makes me nauseous
so I focus on restocking
the Snap-on male
and female connectors.

I know that as Phil and Scott rearrange
the thick rubber Gates hoses,
rub them with their hands,
they watch me. Dick comes
out of the bathroom, drops
a Playboy on the stack,
walks toward the Lubriplate Lubricant shelf.
As I bend to pick up a brake drum,
he brushes his hand against my butt and moans.
I jump, almost knock the Gabriel shock
from its hook on the greasy wall.
Phil and Scott cheer, whistle, wiggle their tongues.
I smile sarcastically, pretend to throw
the brake drum toward them.
"You can't carry that,

much less throw it!" Dick cries,
grabs the drum I hold effortlessly.
I glare, wanting to hit him,
but turn instead toward the grinding machine.
He licks his lips
as I struggle to loosen the crank,
then presses me out of the way
"I almost had it, shithead."
I whisper clenching my fists.

At lunch I plot my revenge:
a disconnected starter wire,
several flat tires, a few fouled spark plugs,
a cracked distributor cap,
sugar or ping pong balls in the gas tank,
or perhaps I'll tell them the only reason
the blond waitress at Joe's Grill
puts up with them--
she's really in love with me.